

RAILROADING in NEW JERSEY

(New Jersey probably had a more important role in the establishment and development of railroads than any other state in the country. This article, the thirteenth of a series, deals with railroading's Golden Quarter Century, from 1890 to 1915.)

THE April sun warmed the boys lounging at the Roseville avenue depot in the Spring of 1898. Down in the distance they could hear the chugging of an engine laboriously climbing the steep grade between Newark station and Roseville.

"You reckon that's the 'Centennial' coming?" asked the smallest boy.

"Nope," replied one of the big boys, abruptly. "Any durn fool over 8 knows the 'Centennial' don't haul these locals—she only pulls the 'Bankers Express.' I figure this'll be the 'Roseville.'"

Sure enough, it was the "Roseville," Number 37 on the Morris & Essex. The engine slowed to a halt at Roseville to drop a bundle of newspapers and pick up a lone West-bound passenger.

Every boy at the depot

thrilled as he waved to the engineer or shouted to him above the snorting of the iron monster headed for far-off, enchanted places. Golly, if only he could grow up to be an engineer...

MEANWHILE, out in Flemington Junction or Phillipsburg or Newton other boys waited at depots or haunted roundhouses and yards, all stricken with the railroad fever which swept over the country between 1890 and 1915. This was railroading's Golden Quarter Century.

Truly, Railroad was King. Everywhere the railroads gathered public favor. Accidents declined, service improved, comfort grew. Railroads made money and railroads spent money. Above all, the railroads apparently had well in hand for all time the problem of getting from

When Railroad Was King



Nolan's Point in the 1890s with Jersey Central excursion trains on a siding.

one place to another in a hurry.

Henry Ford? A crank. This is railroad's Golden Age!

Here in New Jersey there was more railroad mileage in proportion to the area than in any other state. Few places were less than 10 miles from a depot. If a farmer from West Jersey wanted to go to the city he hopped a train. If a swain from Jersey City wanted to take his girl to Lake Hopatcong he bought two tickets on one of Jersey Central's big Sunday excursion trains.

Speed and safety — railroads emphasized those as they set out to court public good-will at the Turn of the Century. Keen competition brought railroad public relations to the fore. Phoebe Snow was born, Casey Jones died; both were promoted to the skies.

SPEED?

New Jersey set off a speed era in 1892 when Engine 385, a brand new Jersey Central Baldwin, rocketed from Jersey City to Philadelphia and back in four hours and 25 minutes.

Several newspapermen riding in cars behind Engine 385 held their hats as the train streaked down the hill west of Fanwood at 92 miles per hour. Later, on a straight-away track, Engine 385 accomplished the miracle of clicking off two miles in 75 seconds. The railroad world buzzed: A speed of 105 miles per hour! A world's record!

The record didn't last long — not with the publicity-minded New York Central around.

In May of 1893 Engine 999 picked up the "Empire State Express" near Batavia, N. Y., and roared over a measured mile at the then unheard of speed of 112.5 miles per hour. That heightened the railroad fever, particularly when the Central induced the government to bring out a 2-cent stamp bearing a likeness of the "Empire State Express."

People who gathered to

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Turn of the Century Was Golden Era of Train Travel With Excursions the Vogue

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

talk about railroads always got around to the famed "Empire State Express." Naturally other railroads set out to propagandize their own "Limiteds" and "Expresses."

THE Lackawanna declared with some pride that it had been running a "Lackawanna Limited" from Hoboken to Buffalo since 1883. "Oldest named train in the country," it boasted.

"We don't have the oldest; we have the newest," the Lehigh Valley countered in 1896 as it announced its new "Black Diamond Express" from Jersey City to Niagara Falls, via the anthracite coal fields.

"Handsome train in the World," shouted the Lehigh Valley ads, without inhibition. All the railroads were claiming much the same thing, so they didn't deny the Lehigh Valley claim. The L. V. went on:

"Fast daylight train . . . lighted throughout by Pintsch gas . . . each car finished in polished Mexican mahogany, with figured mahogany panels and inlaid beveled plate mirrors . . . ceilings are empire dome pattern finished in white and gold."

There was unquestionable admiration for the sleek new "Black Diamond," whose black sides glistened like the anthracite coal which had

made the railroad famous. By 1900 so many newly-married couples had gone to Niagara Falls on the "Black Diamond" that it had the sub-title of "Honeymoon Express."

And, by the way, said the Lehigh Valley, with a certain amount of smugness, "This Line uses anthracite coal entirely, thus avoiding the dense volumes of smoke that so terribly annoys passengers on lines using bituminous coal."

That struck the hard-coal burning Lackawanna in a prideful spot, and some inspired advertising man came up with the memorable "Phoebe Snow" in July, 1900.

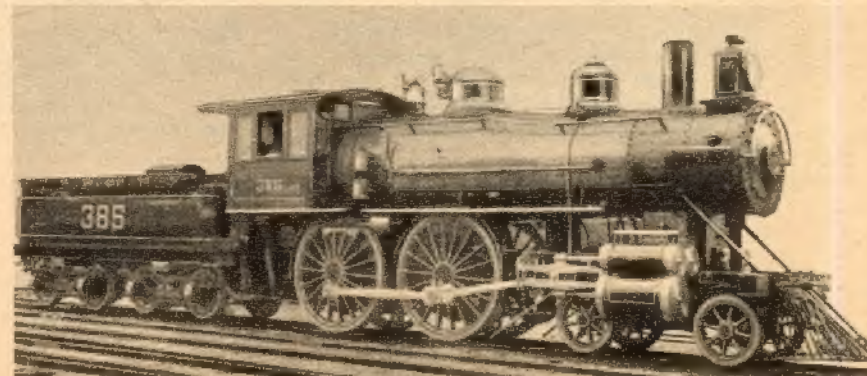
PHOEBE told in rhyme after rhyme how she went to Buffalo and kept her gown spotlessly white—because she rode the Road of Anthracite, the Lackawanna.

The boys hanging around the Erie depot used to tell of Phoebe staggering into Buffalo one day coal-black from glorious head to dainty feet.

"Got on the Erie by mistake," they guffawed.

Of course they would say that about the Erie, the "Calamity Jane." Everything the railroad did got laughs at the Turn of the Century.

Then red-whiskered Fred Underwood brought his keen mind and shrewd sense of



Jersey Central's "385," rail rocket of 1892.

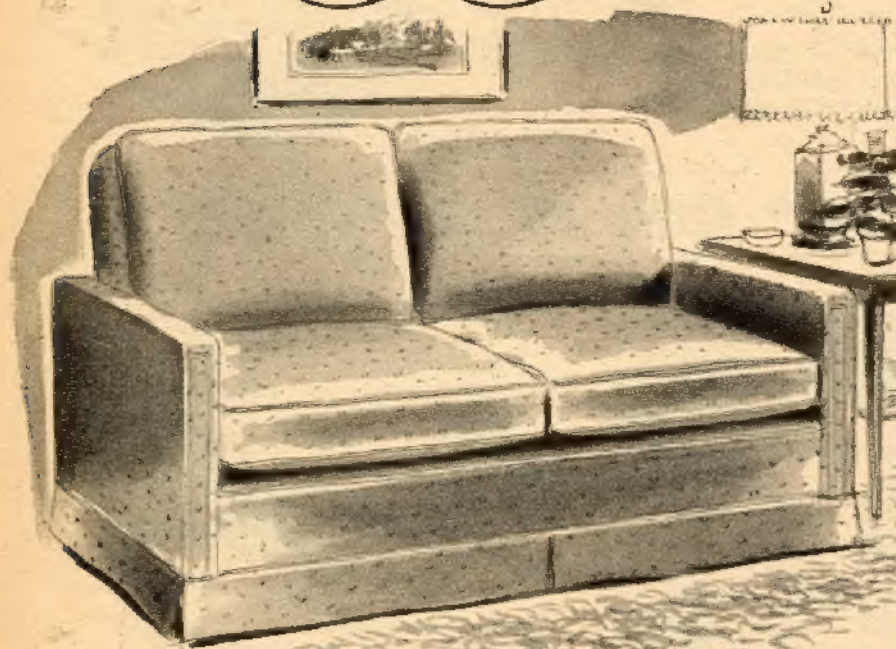


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Lehigh Valley train and huckleberry picnickers.



Pullman parlor car (left) and smoker of 1890s.

humor to the Erie presidency in 1901. They laughed when Fred sat down . . .

Underwood set about energetically to cut down curves, lessen grades and improve the Erie's service. He was cautiously aware of the Erie's non-too-reassuring accident record, however, carrying with him an ax in his private car, "in case we're in an accident and I have to chop my way out."

Quickly the Erie's service improved, but still the commuters laughed (when they weren't grumbling). Underwood told friends that "if it weren't for the Erie half the vaudeville performers would be looking for jobs."

UNDERWOOD decided in 1906 to turn the tables.

For a year and a half every new Erie timetable carried the latest joke about the railroad. It included such gems as these:

"Spring is here at last; the Erie has replaced its snow-plows on its cow-catchers with mowing machines."

"A commuter suggested that the Erie put the cow-catcher on the rear of the train. No Erie train is liable to overtake a cow, but what's to prevent a cow from walking on the back of a car and biting a passenger?"

Several thousand commuters in Bergen and Passaic counties wrote in and commended Underwood, suggesting that he call the whole thing off. Underwood did—and had the last laugh by

publishing all of the jokes in book form.

Underwood shrewdly gauged the public enthusiasm for railroads. He ordered new locomotives on each operating division named after engineers who had seniority and outstanding records at Erie throttles. For less famed drivers he created the Order of the Red Spot, a bright carmine disc under the engine's number plate to indicate that the men who handled that engine performed their jobs loyally and well.

A SIMILAR idea prevailed on the Lackawanna, where a highly-polished brass star and circle on the front of a locomotive told at a glance that the engineer was one of the best. Sadly enough, when W. H. Truesdale succeeded Sam Sloan as Lackawanna president in 1899 he quickly abolished such frills. He believed in solid railroading.

Although Truesdale built the marvelous Cut-Off in 1912 and wonderfully improved the line, many railroaders and fans of all ages never forgave him for painting out the names on their favorite engines. He had failed to recognize the value of employee pride and public interest and enthusiasm. If ever there was enthusiasm among the public for any industry, it was for railroads from 1890 to 1915.

Take the boys at a grammar school in Orange, for example, in 1910. There were few who didn't try to get over

to Highland Avenue station at least a couple of times a week to watch the "Afternoon Parade" of famous West-bound commuter trains.

THEY knew the signals and switches were set to send the aristocrats roaring through Highland avenue on an express track. First came the Passaic & Delaware Express, out of Hoboken at 4:05 P. M., headed for Gladstone over tracks from Summit which still bore the name of the long-defunct Passaic & Delaware Railroad. Ten minutes behind that steamed the Morristown Banker's Express, with Engineer Ben Day at the throttle. Minutes later the Newton-Branchville Express flashed by.

(Incidentally, the P. & D. Express and the Banker's Express now are combined into the Lackawanna train which leaves Hoboken at 4:15 P. M. and Newark at 4:28—first stop Short Hills, rear cars for Gladstone).

Elsewhere in the state the boys hung around the yard, hoping for a ride on a "goat" (switch engine) or maybe just listening to the interchange among trainmen. The latter never disappointed the boys.

Pulling a plug of "Trackman's Solace" from a hip picket, a switching engineer would bite off a chew and hand the plug to a trainman.

"Never forget the time I worked out West," the engineer might say. "We ran into a herd of buffalo. Killed six. Ate nuthin' but buffalo for nigh two months."

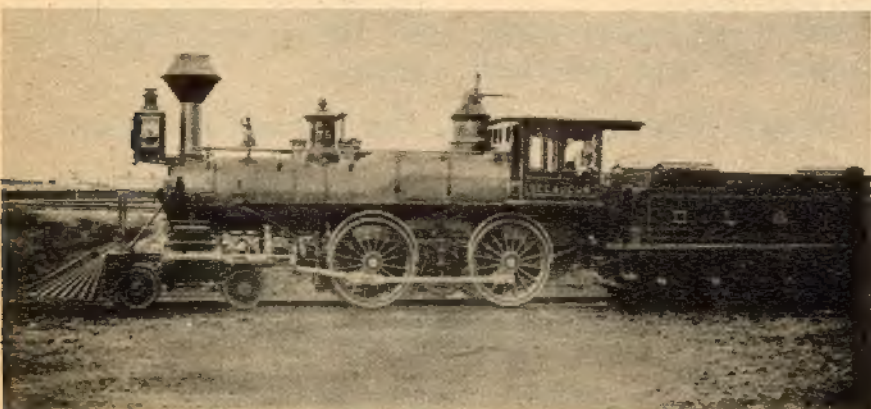
Then the talk for the benefit of the wide-eyed audience would veer to other railroads and other men—like the Susquehanna Railroad engineer who got the nickname "Buttermilk" because he drove his milk train so fast from Sussex that the milk was churned before he got to Jersey City.

Yes, Railroad was King . . .

OLDER folks had the fever, too. They sang the mournful dirge about Engineer Casey Jones, killed in 1900, the song said, when his "big ten-wheeler" rammed another train. They retold the ballad of the "Fast Mail" wrecked on the Southern Railroad, in which Engineer Broady was found with his hand on the throttle, "a-scalded to death with steam."

Even cynical Broadway caught the fever.

In the 1890s theater-goers applauded such as "The Mid- (Continued on Following Page)



The "Secaucus," one of Lackawanna's engines.



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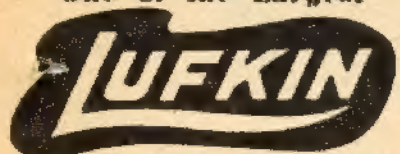
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JERSEY RAILROADS

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)
night Special," "Railroad Jack" and "The Pay Train" and hissed scenes in which the "proud beauty" was lashed to a rail by a skulking villain to await a fearful death from the onrushing Limited (which always arrived a split second after the hero).

Possibly the most famous railroad play of all, however, was "The Fast Mail," which packed them in on Broadway in 1899. It was equally successful in the hinterlands—two companies toured the land with the exciting drama based on the theme that the railway mail clerk always gets through.

CLOSER to home, folks thrilled at real-life railroad drama.

They read with admiration, for example, of Miss Nellie Hand of Trenton, who on December 11, 1905, saw her duty and did it. She was walking home that dark and stormy night when she spied a shed blown down on the Reading Railroad tracks.

Grabbing a lantern from a nearby crossing, Miss Nellie dashed up the tracks and furiously waved to the engineer of the Trenton to New York train. The train screeched to a halt but the heroine disappeared into the gloom.

Five days later the railroad located Miss Hand and offered her a reward. She refused the money.

"Any one would have done it," she observed.

Seemingly as if to heap fuel on the spreading fire of railroad enthusiasm, the railroads advertised splendid new equipment on their long runs. Pullman cars were said to be "gilded, cushioned and upholstered palaces, regarded with awe as they sit on sidings awaiting their masters . . ." There was sufficient interest to prompt etiquette writers to specify good manners on a Pullman, such as:

"If a young mother with a little child enters and has a ticket for the upper berth, whosoever shall hold the lower shall give it up."

PROBABLY, however, that which brought the railroads closest to most Jersey people were the excursions—the jaunts to the Switchback Railroad at Mauch Chunk in the Lehigh Valley, the excursions to Lake Hopatcong, the parties at Bellewood Park and Musconetcong Mountain and the "Specials" to Atlantic City and Washington, D. C.

Almost left out of the excursion trade was the Lackawanna (Morris & Essex), mainly because it permitted

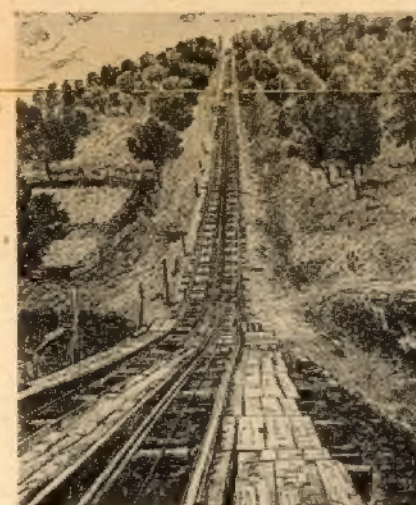


Newark train at Roseville Avenue Station, 1894.

no Sunday trains until 1899. People along the way, both irked and amused, insisted that M. & E. stood not for Morris & Essex but for "Methodist & Episcopal." After the ban was lifted the Lackawanna ran some Sunday school chartered trains to Hopatcong, Cranberry Lake and the Poconos, but the bulk of the Sunday junket traffic had lodged in the hands of the Lehigh Valley and the Jersey Central.

Among other things, the two alternated in taking special Sunday trips up to the famous Switchback at Mauch Chunk, Pa.—"The Switzerland of America."

BUILT originally to carry coal over the mountains, the Switchback had become by the turn of the century a favorite excursion spot. The trip "up to the clouds"



"Switchback" line.

brought the traveler into rarified atmosphere guaranteed free of hay fever. It was a marvelous day for \$1.50 (plus 50 cents to take the Switchback's thrilling mile-a-minute gravity ride over a scenic nine-mile route.)

In 1904 the Lehigh opened Bellewood Park "the delightful excursion resort of the Musconetcong Mountain," and for many years thousands of people rode the Lehigh out to the mountain. There, midway between Flemington and Phillipsburg, they reveled in "high elevation, mountain air, cold springs, babbling brooks and leafy paths."

Still, it remained for Jersey Central to have the finest

short Sunday excursions of all—to Nolan's Point on Lake Hopatcong. As many as 60,000 people took the trips every Summer in the early 1900s. Trains left the main line at High Bridge and rolled north through Bartley, Long Valley and up Hopatcong's east shore to Nolan's Point—the long way 'round.

According to Gustave Kobbe's splendid little book on the Jersey Central, Lake Hopatcong until 1890 "lay almost neglected at the threshold of a great city constantly seeking new fields for Summer amusements."

JERSEY CENTRAL changed that. It bought land at Nolan's Point and laid out excursion grounds, complete with a dance pavilion, swings and walking paths. It was a place "where a body might have no end of fun, but quiet and orderly." A body could also have a hot noon meal for 50 cents.

Many people "concentrated a whole year's holiday into one day at the lake," according to Kobbe, who added that "there is almost a touch of pathos in their unbounded delight."

Accommodations were available for people "of both moderate and ample means"—Nolan's Point Villa at \$2 per day for the moderate and Hotel Breslin at \$5 per day for the ample. At Hotel Breslin, too, the ample could also acquire a rowboat, "by the day, with man \$3; without man, \$2."

Never to be forgotten was the long ride back to Newark or Jersey City, particularly when a good full moon bathed the valley beneath Schooley's Mountain in its soft glow. The thousands of people riding the round trip for \$1 blessed Jersey Central.

Yes, Railroad was King . . .

World War I was just ahead and with it would come sooty soft-coal burning engines and deteriorating rail service. An era was about to die, but for the moment in the full moon in Long Valley up in Jersey everything was bright.

Next Week: Trolleys, the Street Railway



Lehigh Valley's palatial "Black Diamond Express" on its maiden run in 1896.